SR-94 decision: a victory for residents?

By Dave Schwab

A policy change by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), which recently announced it might scale back the proposed freeway widening of express lanes on state Route 94 between the Interstate 805 and 5 interchanges in lieu of introducing more community-based transportation alternatives, has left Uptown neighbors guardedly optimistic.

"We welcome the announcement, but stay very skeptical of SANDAG’s intentions," said Golden Hills homeowner and community spokesperson Valerie Pasquetto. Then she asked, "Is this a Trojan horse?"

SANDAG is the San Diego region’s primary planning, transportation and research agency comprised of 18 cities and county governments, and is responsible for building and maintaining public transportation.

The SR-94 Express Lanes Project had proposed connecting I-805 South Express Lanes with Downtown San Diego by constructing two new Express Lanes along SR-94, one in each direction, and a new direct connector between SR-94 and I-805. The Express Lanes would accommodate new Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service, in addition to carpools/vanpools traveling between South Bay and Downtown connecting to a wider network of Express Lanes on I-805, and at a future date on state Route 15.

A petition drive launched recently by Pasquetto and other Uptown residents has gathered several hundred signatures from local residents opposed to the freeway-widening project. [To read more about that, visit bit.ly/1JM1yS7]

Pasquetto said many Uptown residents want SANDAG “to drop completely the notion of adding footprint to the SR-94 between the I-805 and Downtown. We believe that with the space currently available, there is bandwidth to ensure continuity for the BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) system. In the meantime, SANDAG should invest more resources in developing public transit, bike paths/lanes and pedestrian access that would encourage more people to leave their cars at home. This ultimately will make the perceived need for building new lanes for general purpose redundant.”

She cautioned that while SANDAG “seems to have made a decision that responds to community needs,” she added, “This is just the beginning of looking at transportation planning differently. We will keep abreast of the development to make sure these innovative ways will indeed benefit our communities. We understand that as a result of residents’ strong disapproval, the region will move forward with a transit pilot project and..."
The SR-94 Express Lanes Project proposed to connect I-805 South Express Lanes with Downtown by constructing two new Express Lanes along SR-94, one in each direction, and a new direct connector between SR-94 and I-805. (Courtesy of Caltrans)

Lopez noted that, for several months, residents in communities along SR-94 including...
Golden Hill, City Heights and Sherman Heights "passionately urged SANDAG to consider options that would improve already adverse air quality and traffic. As a result, the region will move forward with a transformative transit pilot project and the draft environmental impact review will be updated to include an analysis of alternatives."

"This is a big victory for more thoughtful transportation choices," said Colin Parent, policy advisor for Circulate San Diego, a group advocating interconnected neighborhoods in which walking, bicycling and taking transit are viable alternatives. "A recently released report titled TransNet Today (circulatesd.nationbuilder.com/transnettoday) shows how SANDAG can use existing dollars to meet today's transportation challenges. The decision to re-evaluate the 94 expansion shows that SANDAG can expand transit, without demolishing historic urban neighborhoods."

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